



# *A Thread In Time*

**Newsletter of the National Society of Descendants of  
Textile Workers of America, Inc.**

[www.textileworker.com](http://www.textileworker.com)

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## ***President's Message***

My first message is a message of thanks to our past Treasurer, Gail Rebello, and past Secretary, Dawn Darche. They are both charter members and have served in their positions since the inception of the society. They have served with distinction and their contributions are greatly appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge the heart and soul of our society, First President and charter member Mary Brown. Mary has been the driving force behind the growth of the society and has served selflessly and with distinction since the inception of the society. I can only hope that my term as president is as noteworthy as Mary's terms have. She deserves a round of thanks from all of us.

With growth comes change. Our society is continuing to grow as witnessed by our annual meeting. Two years ago, those in attendance could be counted on one hand. Since then we have had to move from the Windham Textile Museum, down the street to the Willimantic Brewing Company where over a dozen members met to elect new officers on March 10, 2013.

I am very happy to announce that the following individuals have agreed to serve in my administration; Vice President, Melody L. Guillmette, Treasurer, Nancy A. Merwin, Secretary, Ida J. Ransom and Genealogist, Mary F. Brown. It is our desire to serve the society and help it grow.

Suggestions for future possible actions discussed at our annual meeting were; a Day of Celebration possibly around Samuel Slater as he was an innovator in the textile industry; an Insignia Committee to develop items which can be sold to enhance the scholarship fund; a By Laws committee to address

regional/district Chapters; and a life membership pin to wear on the insignia ribbon.

We also agreed to issue newsletters twice a year, late spring and late fall. As we grow I would like to increase the number of newsletters as we have more information to share. One way to achieve this without the added cost of publication is to offer "electronic issues". The electronic issue would also allow publishing of color photos. We would still offer regular issues to those without email. If you are interested in receiving the newsletter in electronic format, please send an email to NSDTWA@gmail.com.

*Regards, Bill Warner*

For those that are not familiar with Willimantic, it is known as the "Thread City" being the home to the Old American Thread Company Mill located on the Willimantic River and across the street from the Windham Textile Museum and down the street from the Willimantic Brewing Company. The area is very historic and the mill was an inspiration to our insignia.



Old American Thread Company Mill, Willimantic, CT

# What I Learned Working in the Leather Mills

by William A. Warner, guest author

*The mill worker theme in the most recent issue of American Ancestors magazine sparked quite a bit of interest. NEHGS member William Warner of Thompson, Connecticut, submitted the following reflection on his work in two leather mills in Peabody, Massachusetts. — Editor.*

I graduated from Lynn [Mass.] Vocational Technical High School in 1973, just as the recession hit. Finding a job in my field of electronics was very difficult. Many of my relatives worked for General Electric in Lynn or the leather mills in Peabody. When I couldn't find a job, I looked to the employers of my relatives. After filling out more job applications than I care to remember, I finally got a call from A.C. Lawrence Leathers, where my grandmother worked. They had an opening at their Pulaski Street plant where they manufactured patent leather.

My job at the mill was to fill in wherever a body was needed. The workers that stretched the leather hides onto the frames worked in teams of two or four, and it was difficult work. If there was an odd number of workers, then I would be called, otherwise I would supply the required hides to the stretchers. Once enough hides were stretched, they would start up the "Daub" machine, which added the colored finish. A team of two workers loaded the frames onto the conveyor while I wiped the leather down with tacky cheesecloth on the end of a pole to remove any dirt on the leather before it was coated.

The extraordinary amount of teamwork in a physically challenging environment is especially amazing when you consider that most of my coworkers were first generation immigrants. They were from Italy, Greece, Turkey, Portugal, the Dominican Republic, and many other countries. They were here for a better future, and all they wanted was a chance to work hard and earn enough to support their families. Quite a few of them could not speak English and a lot of communication was done via sign language.

One of my coworkers, Kari, was from Turkey. He immigrated with his mother, wife, and two daughters. I would visit his house after work and help his mother study for the citizenship test. It was her dream to become an American citizen. Her granddaughters and I would also help her practice her English. One of the first American traditions they embraced was Thanksgiving. I still remember having Thanksgiving at their home, with turkey and all the fixings, and their gratitude at being in America.

After about a year, A.C. Lawrence Leathers closed their patent leather business. I was fortunate to be transferred to their Webster Street plant where various kinds of leather were manufactured. It also gave me a chance to work with my grandmother, who had been there for over twenty-five years. Even though I was 6'2", I became "Fran's little grandson." At this facility, most of my coworkers were again first and second generation immigrants, with the notable exception of my grandmother, an eighth generation immigrant — a direct descendant of Pilgrim Henry Sampson.

My job at this mill was also to fill in where I was needed. One week I would be on first shift, the next week on third shift. I also worked in almost every department, from finishing coat leather to embossing leather so it resembled alligator hide. In most assignments I was part of a team, and as with the Pulaski Street plant, there was considerable teamwork. I even had the opportunity to operate the same machinery as my grandmother; she steam-pressed the leather, not an easy job. But then, most jobs at the mill were not easy; it was hard work in difficult conditions and no one complained.

I worked there until the recession finally claimed A.C. Lawrence Leathers as one of its victims. My grandmother retired, and I went into electronics. My time at A.C. Lawrence Leathers was much more than just a job to pay the bills — I learned the value of hard work and also got to know my grandmother better. Most importantly, I learned to appreciate America, from the perspective of my coworkers who worked hard, without complaint, for the privilege of being here.

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Russell DeGrafft representing our society at the NERGC (New England Regional Genealogical Conference) held in April 17 - 20 Manchester, NH. This year's theme was "Woven in History – The Fabric of New England". It was appropriate that our society was represented there since we honor our ancestors that worked in the textile industry and we thank Russ for his hard work in helping our society grow.

**Treasurers Report**

Checking Account	\$ 1802.38
Scholarship Fund	\$ 1426.20
Life Member Endowment Fund	\$ 1018.31
Total as of March 10, 2013	\$ 4246.89

**Officers**

President	William A. Warner <a href="mailto:NSDTWA@gmail.com">NSDTWA@gmail.com</a>
Vice President	Melody L. Guillmette <a href="mailto:melodylee14@hotmail.com">melodylee14@hotmail.com</a>
Secretary	Ida J. Ransom <a href="mailto:iransom@snet.net">iransom@snet.net</a>
Treasurer	Nancy A. Merwin <a href="mailto:Nancyamerwin284@gmail.com">Nancyamerwin284@gmail.com</a>
Genealogist	Mary F. Brown <a href="mailto:mbrown@ct.metrocast.net">mbrown@ct.metrocast.net</a>



Officers being sworn in during our annual meeting, left to right, Genealogist Mary Brown, Treasurer Nancy Merwin, President Bill Warner, Secretary Ida Ransom and outgoing Secretary Dawn Darche.

**Scholarship**

A goal of our Society is to provide scholarships to Vocational School students. The scholarship does not have to be used for college. It can be for licensing fees, tools, etc. The student must meet the following criteria:

1. Exemplary work ethic
2. Respect for self, family, peers, and persons in authority
3. Strong background and interest in American History
4. Good academic performance
5. Attendance record indicates no suspensions or unexcused absences

This program will soon be opened to Vocational School students in other states. Please support our scholarship endowment fund to make this possible.

**Insignia**

You may order our insignia pin for \$45 including shipping and handling. Send a check made out to NSDTWA to Nancy Merwin, 284 Chesterfield Road, Oakdale, CT 06370. All proceeds from the sale of this medal are placed in the scholarship fund.

**Membership Notice**

The opportunity to enjoy life membership is offered at:  
 Under age 50 – 30 times the annual dues  
 Age 50 and older – 20 times the annual dues

**Samuel Slater** (June 9, 1768 – April 21, 1835) was called the "Father of the American Industrial Revolution" by President Andrew Jackson, because he brought British textile technology to America. He founded many textile mills in New England, including the first, Slater Mill in Pawtucket, RI. Let us remember him this June 9<sup>th</sup>, the Sunday before Father's Day.

**Website**

Once again, I invite you to visit our outstanding website at [www.textileworker.com](http://www.textileworker.com). This website was designed and is maintained by Tracy Crocker. You will notice that some of the honor roll members have special attachments with anecdotes about their life. You are welcome to submit material about your ancestor.

Please contact Tracy Crocker at [Tracy@tracycrocker.com](mailto:Tracy@tracycrocker.com) or Mary Brown at [mbrown@ct.metrocast.net](mailto:mbrown@ct.metrocast.net) for submission of this material.